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DISCUSSION OF TRANSPORTATION, PORT AND TERMINAL FACILITIES

RICHARD C. HARRISON, First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Docks and Ferries:

You may be interested in connection with this wonderful port of ours to know a little about the way it is administered. We have an army of approximately two thousand men employed in the department of docks and ferries and we are spending this year only a shade under two million dollars to administer the port of New York.

What are we doing with it? First of all, from what the mayor has said, it must be clear to you that the department of docks and ferries is primarily a business department. We differ much from most of the city departments in that fact. We are practically dealing with customers of the city, our merchants, our maritime interests, those who deal in imports and exports. They come to us and ask us for our wares, that is, the piers, the bulkheads, the terminal facilities, all those things which the city has provided to take care of these great interests.

Fortunately, through a wise policy—strangely wise in view of some other things which the city of New York did in the old days,—as long ago as 1870, when the department of docks and ferries was started, the city began to acquire its waterfront. Since that time we have acquired and we now own some two hundred and thirty-two piers, ranging from the wonderful structures with which you are all familiar at Chelsea, where the big liners come in, down to comparatively small but relatively no less important piers where we handle our building materials and those heavy, perhaps uninteresting objects which go so much to make up the commercial prosperity of the city. A great many of these piers, approximately two-thirds I should say offhand, are leased. The city charter provides that the sinking fund commission, which is made up of the mayor, the comptroller, the president of the board of aldermen, the city chamberlain and the chairman of the finance committee of the board of aldermen, may lease the piers for a term of ten years with a maximum of four renewals, bringing it up to a total of fifty years. As a matter of fact, the city has leased few of its piers for a longer period than thirty years, but even with that condition existing, we find at the present time the rather unfortunate condition of a large portion of our most valuable waterfront here in Manhattan being tied up under leases which still have a substantial term to run and which make difficult certain readjustments in many instances desirable and necessary.

In addition to these leased piers, we have a large number of what we call open piers. These piers are perhaps not so imposing as the Chelsea piers. They are piers which most of us do not see often; but as a matter of fact, if it were not for them, the city of New York would be in a bad way; for they are piers where anyone can bring his boat, tie up, unload his cargo, and load again at nominal rates fixed by the legislature of the state of New York for the express purpose of encouraging the use of the piers and not for purposes of revenue. The average boat can tie up at one of these piers at an expense of only fifty cents a day, so they furnish a valuable adjunct to the commercial prosperity of the entire port.

Secondly, the department of docks and ferries is a great engineering and construction department. We have a force paid for out of what is known as corporate stock, that is, bonds on which the city borrows money for a term of fifty years for permanent improvements. Approximately a million dollars a year has been devoted to keeping up in the department of docks and ferries a permanent construction force, that is, engineers who shall draw plans for the improvement of the waterfront, the building of the great sea wall which is practically completed around Manhattan Island at the present time, the construction of some of the smaller pier work and all those things which go to make up the physical upbuilding of the port of New York.

In addition to the actual work done by the department force, the department of docks and ferries is charged with the important work of drawing plans and specifications for all the great port work which is done under contract. The mayor alluded to one of those important works which is going on at the present time, and just in order to give you some little idea of what the responsibilities and duties of our engineering staff are, I will elaborate on it just for a moment or two. At Forty-sixth street in the borough of Manhattan a site was selected for the construction of the new long passenger steamship piers. It was necessary at that particular site to dig out slips for the accommodation of steamships giving us a clear depth of water of forty-four feet. We found, however, that at a comparatively shallow depth below water level we struck bed rock, and the practical impossibility of taking out that rock under water in the wet made it necessary for us to enter upon one of the greatest engineering feats which is going on in the civilized world at the present time. We have constructed at that point what is known as a coffer-dam. A coffer-dam perhaps does not mean much to those of us who are not engineers, but reduced to its lowest terms it is nothing more or less than a temporary retaining wall to hold out water so that we can get an area back of it dry and keep it dry long enough to do temporary

work. At Forty-sixth street we have constructed a huge wall built of steel piles similar to railroad ties sixty-eight feet in length, driving them down to bed rock, and we are going to hold up the entire weight of the Hudson River, not for a day, not for a week, but for months while we keep an area of approximately seven and a half acres dry long enough to blast out rock down to a depth of forty-four feet. That work is going on at the present time. We have built our dam; we have practically pumped it out. It has reached a point where it is interesting even to laymen, and if any of you are in the neighborhood of the Hudson River and Forty-sixth street, it would certainly pay you to go there and see what is being done. In looking at it, I should like you to realize that it is being done by city engineers, men who are on the payroll, men who are your employees.

In addition to its functions as a business and as a construction department, the department of docks and ferries is a great supervising department. Not only have we responsibility for our own city-owned piers, but we have general supervision and control over all waterfront structures. If a man owns a piece of waterfront property, he cannot improve it until he submits his plans and specifications to the department of docks and ferries for examination and approval. That means that our engineers have to assume enormous responsibility and that an immense amount of work must be done in examining all these private plans to see if they are in proper form, and then subsequently in supervising in a general way the construction of the structures that are called for by them.

In addition to that particular feature of supervision, we have also the important supervising function of caring for the waterfront. For example, we clean the marginal streets. Technically and legally such streets are not streets at all, although they are paved and look very much like streets. Legally and actually they are marginal wharves, bulkheads, built for the primary purpose of handling cargoes between the city proper and the waterfront. The most important of these, and one which you have probably all seen, is that important marginal street on the west side of the borough of Manhattan running all the way from the Battery up to Fifty-ninth street. It is a marginal way one hundred and eighty feet in width outside of West street. The dock department has exclusive care of that, the paving of it, the cleaning of ice and snow from it, and the regulation of the handling of freight across it.

The last important function of this department is an operating function. We are a department not only of docks, but of ferries. The city of New York operates, as you know, two important ferries; one from the

foot of Whitehall street to Staten Island and the other from the foot of South street to South Brooklyn. In this operation the city uses nine palatial boats of a type far superior to anything that you will find in ferry service anywhere else in the entire world. Unfortunately, for a number of years the operation of the municipal ferries has been held up as a dreadful example, as the one standing stock argument why municipal ownership of public utilities should not be engaged in. This is extremely unfair. It has a grain of truth in it, or has had in the past; but at the same time it has been entirely overlooked that we are operating a *de luxe* service, a service which no private concern could think of operating. We are operating it at rates utterly inadequate to pay cost of operation, and we are doing it purposely because we feel that there are certain collateral advantages in the operation of ferries outside the direct financial return. We feel that it is important to build up the outlying sections of the city, the borough of Richmond, and South Brooklyn, for example, and therefore we have been carrying passengers a five-mile haul for five cents. Recently we have even brought that down to two cents, because you can now ride to Staten Island and get a transfer which will take you up town on one of the surface cars reaching South Ferry, all for a five-cent fare, and of that five cents the city of New York gets two. The vehicle rates over the ferries have been only a half and sometimes a third of what private companies have charged for the same accommodations.

As a matter of fact, we have introduced notable economies during the present administration in the operation of these ferries. We found, for example, that the Staten Island branch of the municipal ferries was operating at a deficit of \$189,000 a year. In the first year of this administration, we reduced that by \$159,000. In 1914 we turned this deficit into an operating profit of \$15,000. That has been brought about not by any reduction in service, for we are giving precisely the same service to-day that we have always given. The saving has been brought about by economical administration. We found, for example, that we were burning pea coal. Pea coal is a very nice coal to burn; it is easy for stokers, and it produces an even type of heat; but it is expensive, costing approximately four dollars a ton. Now we are making our stokers work a little harder, using a type of coal which to-day is costing us two dollars and seventy cents a ton. We have also made notable economies in the matter of repairs. Instead of turning our boats over to private contractors and allowing them to make repairs, while the crew sit around and do nothing, we have compelled the crews of the boats to make minor adjustments and repairs. In that way, we have saved a large amount of money and we expect to be able to save even more.

That, in a brief, general way tells you what the department of docks and ferries is doing to make and keep New York the greatest port in the world.

EDWARD M. BASSETT, Former Member of the Public Service Commission, First District:

The city of New York has grown here because this is a great port; not only that, but because the port is situated in the right place, midway between the ice-bound harbors of the north and those harbors further south that are too warm for the safe handling of freight. It is also opposite the best grades leading across the mountains to the great Mississippi valley. All these factors have helped to make this par excellence the port of North America.

I like to see people name the port as the main feature of New York, although my own connection with the city has been more along the lines of rapid transit, because if the port were not here and if the port were not made most useful, there would not be much need of rapid transit or many other of the utilities that go to make a convenient and helpful city. If this city had a population of only three hundred thousand, it could get along very well with surface cars, but by reason of its great port it has become a city of more than five millions. When a city becomes as large as that, it needs rapid transit, or else it becomes a hide-bound city. Its people must live far enough from traffic centers to avoid congested conditions. Rapid transit is simply that sort of passenger transit by which one can go from station to station, whether on the surface, above ground or underground, without stopping for other vehicles or for anything else. Rapid transit becomes the means of shooting people quickly from traffic centers, which should be multiplied in our city as they are in London, out to the periphery of the city. To-day it is not the distance from the center of the city or from your destination that matters; it is the time that it takes to go. You can measure land values and to a large extent rent by the time it takes to go from any locality to the place where people most congregate in the city. Officials of the city should lay out rapid transit lines, therefore, not so as to increase land values or to put up rent or to duplicate Harlem conditions, although higher values will always come with greater conveniences, but so as to open up the greatest possible part of that area which is within the shortest distance of the center of the city. In other words, their object should be to create a round city instead of a long city, because a round city has the greatest area with the shortest distances to the

center, whereas the long city has the smallest area with the longest distances to the center. A round city is an economical city. London, Berlin and Paris are admirably situated to become round cities and they have grown so just as naturally as a drop of water assumes a spherical form in falling to the earth. New York city in the past, however, because of geographical limitations, and to some extent municipal limitations also, has tended to become a congested city, growing north and still farther north, until more recently after consolidation and by modern electrical transportation, making tunnels as useful as bridges, the barriers of the surrounding rivers have been broken down, and now New York at last is rapidly becoming a round city, an economical city, a city that is not going to duplicate Harlem conditions, that is spreading out land values, spreading out the area for sunny homes within a short and convenient ride to the traffic centers of the whole city.

What I am pointing out is the economy of our great city, because it goes with the advantages of our great port. Our great city cannot compete, its port cannot make us compete in some ways with the cities of the hinterland that are smaller and so can house their workmen in homes within a short distance of their work, unless we take care of the welfare of families. Cities of the past, such as the great manufacturing cities of England, have been devourers of families because of improper housing conditions, and New York city to some extent has been the same. The cost of living has been high on account of rents, for one thing, and of food also. If a man wanted to escape to the outland where he could bring up a family of five children and live in the sun, he has had to travel an hour out and an hour back, sometimes an hour and a half out and an hour and a half back—too much to take out of a working man's time. If you crowd him in the city, he cannot bring up a family; thus the city becomes a devourer of families. If you throw him on the outside without rapid transit, it takes more of his time to go and come to his work than is economical. Hence the need of the rapid transit system and its enlargement.

I shall not go largely into the various phases of our great transportation system. Until the subway was built the whole system was privately owned, and went only to the most congested parts of the city. The first rapid transit subway that was built, owned by the city, was laid out likewise with congestion as the keynote of its origin and construction. It picked out the most congested traffic, the greatest number of short hauls, going over to Brooklyn to the Long Island station, taking in a little piece of that borough where the greatest number of fares would be obtained, regardless of distributing the advantages of rapid transit.

The authorities of the city came to the conclusion, however, about the time that Mr. Hughes was governor of this state, that the city might well inaugurate a new system of rapid transit, helping to make the city a round city, not following the real estate owners' idea of congestion, but going out in all directions to open up parts of the city not otherwise approachable. All of these subway lines are city owned, and I lay it down here as an axiom for the city to follow that the underground of our streets should at all times be owned by the city and kept under its control.

Some outlying parts of the subway system are elevated and still owned by the city, but concomitant with this enlarged rapid transit system going into Brooklyn, The Bronx, and Queens, there has been an enlargement also of the privately owned rapid transit elevated railroads. A privilege has been given for third track extension. The franchise runs for eighty-five years.

There has been a difference of opinion between groups in the city on the proper way of extending the rapid transit system. Some, with whom I have sympathized, have favored shorter operating agreements than have been made with the companies; but under all the circumstances it has seemed necessary to go ahead with these rather long-term operating contracts. The city retains the right, however, to recapture its own subways at any time after ten years.

The five-cent fare is to be the fare throughout the whole city. Harlem and The Bronx have had a great advantage, because they could distribute their families through every business zone of Manhattan at a five-cent fare. Brooklyn and Queens were in a ten- and fifteen-cent relation to the parts of the city where people were most employed. Under the new rapid transit system, however, there is to be a five-cent fare from all the boroughs excepting Richmond, not only to Manhattan but through Manhattan, so that there is a new possibility of housing our people in sunny homes with a quick and convenient ride to their work. Along with the port facilities that are increasing there is growing up also this great rapid transit system that is making our great city a habitable place for twenty or thirty millions of people, so that it will not devour families but will allow them to increase.